

BANGOR ACADEMY COLLABORATIVE UNIT EVALUATION

“Pirates of the Caribbean”

INTRODUCTION

Bangor Academy is a co-educational non-selective school which is located on a split site. Years 8 and 9 are taught on the junior campus. There are approximately 220 pupils in Year 8. These pupils are divided across four broad ability bands of ten classes.

The school decided to deliver the “It’s a Wrap” collaborative unit (written by CCEA) to Year 8 pupils. This unit was delivered in Term 2 and was so successful that the school decided to develop a second collaborative unit for delivery in Term 3 which would involve input from different departments than in the “It’s a Wrap” unit.

Supported by CCEA personnel, the concept for the “Pirates of the Caribbean” was devised and developed.

FIRST STEPS

A team of teachers came together to develop and lead the unit of work. These members of staff were drawn from the Geography, Religious Studies and History departments and were led by a Senior Teacher. There was a blend of youth and experience amongst these staff.

The teachers involved had gained a lot of insight into the actual delivery of a collaborative unit because of the fact that the Art and Design, Music, English, Home Economics, ICT and Mathematics departments had already undertaken the “It’s a Wrap” unit.

During the planning meetings it was agreed that the unit would be delivered over a three-week period starting and culminating with one of the “Pirates” film DVDs. The process and the timeline for the unit were mapped out. It was planned to deliver the unit during the summer term.

Departments involved in this unit reported that the planning, preparation and delivery of this unit generated a considerable workload for teachers. These are issues which should be given consideration by those planning for this type of unit in the future.

WHAT BANGOR ACADEMY HAD TO WORK AROUND TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Class Groups

In many ways, the ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ unit was less problematic than the “It’s a Wrap” unit. Fewer subjects were involved so the whole unit was easier to manage. All three subjects involved (Geography, Religious Studies and History) were taught in whole classes, so consideration did not have to be given to split classes and pupil groups. Each subject was contributing to the unit during normal timetabled time and had decided on its own content, so no single department’s progress was hindered by another.

Timetabling

The timetable was suspended for the launch and the culmination of the 'Pirates' unit, it was intended that Geography, Religious Studies and History would all use their own timetabled periods during the three weeks of the unit. This allowed Geography and History a total of nine teaching periods over the three weeks (three periods per week for three weeks) and RE had six periods in total (two periods per week).

However, all of the teachers involved in the 'Pirates' unit were still carrying a heavy Term 3 timetable because they were teaching on an exclusively junior campus, so the situation was not ideal.

Preparation and Planning

The Senior Management Team in Bangor Academy made time available for teachers to meet and plan together before undertaking work for this collaborative unit. This was facilitated by allowing the three departments to use part of an INSET day for this planning work with support from a CCEA officer. Also, the timetabler had an overview which allowed her to create opportunities for the 3 Heads of Department to meet occasionally as part of the school day. Teachers involved met both formally and informally.

Initially they generated ideas by means of a thought shower. Considerable time was spent on deciding on the methodologies to use and the activities that the pupils would be involved in. Then, the individual departments were involved in sourcing, designing and making their own resources. Throughout, staff endeavoured to focus on the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities that could be explicitly developed through this unit.

Communication

Roles and responsibilities for those involved were clearly assigned and articulated at the outset of this piece of work and proved essential to the success of this unit. All of the teaching staff in the school were kept informed about the collaborative unit right from the outset of the term. Many staff from across the school attended the launch and culmination activities. However, communication of information related to 'Pirates' was much less onerous than for 'It's a Wrap' because of the fact that only three subjects were involved.

Associated Costs

Bangor Academy met the cost of any necessary materials through normal departmental budgets, however, additional expenditure was as follows:

- Staff cover
- Raw materials for trebuchets (catapults), including wood, elastic bands
- Photocopying/administrative costs

Equipment

The two 'Pirates of the Caribbean' DVDs had to be bought and the only other equipment needed was the digital cameras.

POSITIVES/BENEFITS OF PROJECT

Enjoyment

One of the main challenges of the Revised Curriculum is to move away from a curriculum fragmented into subject strands which are always taught in parallel. The aim is to move towards one which is more connected, enjoyable, motivating and relevant.

During the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' unit, it was evident from observing the pupils that they shared a great sense of enjoyment, motivation and excitement which empowered them and gave them control over their own learning. As a result, self-esteem was raised and confidence was instilled.

Some of the comments made by the pupils are listed below:

- *"The best thing was making the catapult."*
- *"It was fun working in a group."*
- *"The treasure hunt was really good."*
- *"I enjoyed learning about the different pirates."*

Skills Development

Throughout the project, pupils had opportunities to work towards specific outcomes to develop the skills of:

- Managing Information
- Working With Others
- Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making
- Being Creative
- Using ICT
- Communication

Pupils were provided with a variety of different activities to stimulate their thinking. These included:

- researching
- brainstorming
- comparing and evaluating ideas
- dealing with conflicting ideas
- discussing stereotypes
- working out how to solve a practical problem
- following a sequence of instructions
- empathy

This was achieved in a learning environment which supported thinking. Pupils were given opportunities to talk and ask questions, to consider problems and suggest solutions and to reflect on their thinking and learning at various stages during the

process of the unit. Pupils also had opportunities to develop various aspects of two of the cross-curricular skills of Using ICT and Communication.

Knowledge and Understanding

Pupils developed their knowledge and understanding of:

- locations of modern piracy and how piracy has an impact on their lives (Geography);
- of the concept of piracy in relation to the Ten Commandments (RE); and
- what piracy means in an historical and modern way and how its implications are global (History).

Final Day

The final day of the unit was held on the penultimate day of term. Each class set had two periods out of class (one for the treasure hunt and one to make the trebuchet). This process was staggered to avoid too many pupils being out of class at any one time.

The treasure hunt centred on the basic idea of pirates hunting for buried treasure and therefore, was closely linked with spatial skills in Geography. Pupils worked in small groups of four or five. They were given cryptic clues which led them to a variety of locations in a circular route around the school grounds. The treasure hunt was not a timed exercise but teachers were able to ascertain that groups had visited each location.

In making the trebuchet (a catapult-like device), groups had to follow a set of instructions and work together as a team.

The unit culminated with a whole year group assembly. Awards were given to the winners of the treasure hunt and to the group whose trebuchet could fire a marshmallow the furthest distance.

Other benefits included:

- Teachers working and planning together.
- Pupils taking greater responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils learning to work cooperatively.
- Pupils making connections and understanding relevance thanks to a central theme and a common finishing point across a number of subjects.
- Links with Learning for Life and Work.

WHAT BANGOR ACADEMY WILL DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME

Bangor Academy will continue to run this unit again in the future but will have to modify it considerably. It is actually the case that new problems may replace the existing problems because of the imminent move to the new school building.

- Last year there was difficulty because of the fact that not all pupils were able to get access to computers when necessary. This will not be a problem in the new building.
- The staff involved in this unit felt that the timing of the unit within the school year was too late and had planned to run it in May rather than June this year. However, with the move to the new school building scheduled for 1st May, it seems that 'Pirates' will run in June for this academic year too.
- Last year, when the unit took place on the school's junior campus, the teaching staff involved were carrying heavy timetables but the unit did not cause any disruption to pupils doing external exams. This year, the move to the new school building will bring the entire school together and therefore, scheduling of the various parts of the unit will take on greater significance in order to avoid disruption to public exams
- Last year the treasure hunt aspect of 'Pirates' was a great success. However, this year, the Year 8 pupils will have been on the new site for just a month and this raises the question whether or not the treasure hunt will work in unfamiliar surroundings.
- The teacher who had overall responsibility for coordinating the unit reported that she would have liked to have seen more inter-departmental work at the end of the unit, perhaps in the form of class debates. This is something which Bangor Academy hopes to incorporate into the 'Pirates' unit this year.

The coordinator envisages that it will be next year (that is, the third time through the 'Pirates' unit) before the school is able to run everything as she would wish.

Pupil Assessment

The SMT in Bangor Academy had agreed not to make assessment a priority in the first year of running this collaborative unit. It is planned that the cross-curricular skill of Using ICT will be assessed through the 'Pirates' unit in the future but this will be impossible during the forthcoming academic year because of the huge logistical move into the new school building in May 2008.